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COOPERATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES WITH UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENTS, SPECIALIZED AGENCIES, FUNDS, PROGRAMMES AND MECHANISMS

UNIVERSAL RATIFICATION

IMPROVING THE OPERATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES

SERVICING OF THE TREATY BODIES

Follow up to the recommendations of the 10th meeting

Report of the secretariat

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INTRODUCTION

1. At their 10th meeting, the chairpersons discussed, inter alia, the issues of cooperation with United Nations departments, specialized agencies, funds, programmes and mechanisms; universal ratification of the principal international human rights treaties; improving the operation of the treaty monitoring bodies; servicing of the treaty bodies; and status of the Plans of Action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. At that meeting, the chairpersons adopted a number of recommendations relating to these issues. The present report contains information on relevant developments in these areas. Information on other issues dealt with at the 10th meeting of chairpersons that require follow-up are provided in separate documents.

I. COOPERATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES WITH UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENTS, SPECIALIZED AGENCIES, FUNDS, PROGRAMMES AND MECHANISMS

2. At their 10th meeting, the chairpersons underlined the importance of the supportive work of and fruitful cooperation with a number of specialized agencies, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations. The chairpersons were informed of ongoing cooperation between the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) being undertaken pursuant to the memorandum of understanding concluded between the two bodies in March 1998. Areas in which cooperation was actively being pursued included the programme "Human rights strengthening - HURIST", human rights training for UNDP staff, and involvement in the work of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/53/432, annex, paras. 21-23).

3. Since that meeting, OHCHR and UNDP have consulted extensively on the elements of the joint programme HURIST. The two bodies have concluded the design of the programme and launched it in April 1999. The programme aims to make funds and expertise available to UNDP country offices for a wide variety of human rights-related activities. There will be five main groups of activities under HURIST (referred to as "windows"). **Window 1** is placed in the governance context and is aimed at developing institutional capacity to develop national plans for the promotion of human rights. Pilot cases will be undertaken in five countries, one in each region. **Window 2** will support five pilot projects demonstrating human rights approaches to sustainable human development (SHD). **Window 3** will promote the ratification of human rights treaties through workshops and seminars. **Window 4** aims to foster a global dialogue on the human rights dimensions of key subjects, beginning with globalization. **Window 5** will respond to requests from countries for programming support in the field of human rights, provide funding for United Nations volunteers serving in UNDP country offices and facilitate interaction between HURIST and regional-level activities in the field of human rights.

4. Considerable progress has also been made in relation to the training of UNDP staff (see para. 14).

5. As indicated at the 10th meeting of chairpersons, UNDP has begun to become more actively involved in the work of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. On the day of general discussion of the Committee on the right to education, held in December 1998, UNDP joined other agencies in contributing a background paper and participating in the discussion. In addition, a number of UNDP field offices have contributed valuable information on the situation of human rights in States whose reports were being considered by the Committee and the office in Santo Domingo supported members of the Committee during their mission to the Dominican Republic on the right to housing.

6. Further pursuant to the memorandum of understanding, OHCHR and UNDP will ensure that the concluding observations of all treaty bodies are made available to UNDP resident representatives. In this regard, OHCHR has requested the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat to ensure that, when concluding observations are sent to United Nations Information Centres in the field, they are shared with the local UNDP office as a matter of routine.

II. PROMOTION OF UNIVERSAL RATIFICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES

7. At past meetings, the chairpersons repeatedly called upon the United Nations system as a whole to accord high priority to efforts to encourage and facilitate ratification of each of the six main human rights treaties by every State. At their 10th meeting, they recommended that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights develop a concerted and comprehensive action programme to promote universal ratification in cooperation with specialized agencies and United Nations funds and programmes, in particular UNDP, and to report to the chairpersons at their 11th meeting on the action taken in this regard.

8. The High Commissioner for Human Rights encourages ratification of the main treaties on an ongoing basis in her dialogue with Governments during country visits and other meetings, as does the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The High Commissioner also encourages other parts of the United Nations system to become actively involved in efforts to promote universal ratification. In this regard, strong advances have been made particularly with regard to one key partner, namely UNDP. UNDP agrees on the importance of promoting universal ratification and has pledged that pursuing it would be the responsibility of all resident representatives in the field. Within the framework of the joint Task Force on the Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding, OHCHR is preparing to transmit to UNDP basic materials to assist resident representatives in raising the issue with relevant government officials.

9. Attention is also drawn to the joint programme HURIST. As noted in paragraph 3, ratification is one of five main "windows" of activities (window 3). In this connection, HURIST envisages the organization of three workshops at the regional or subregional level with the participation of

States that have ratified the least number of the treaties. Among the participating States, those expressing interest in pursuing the matter in greater depth would have the opportunity to request that a national workshop be organized to familiarize a broader range of national officials with the importance and the implications of ratification.

III. IMPROVING THE OPERATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES

A. Regional meetings

10. At their 10th meeting, the chairpersons strongly requested that necessary steps be taken to enable the four human rights treaty bodies meeting only in Geneva to hold occasional sessions in New York and for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to hold sessions in Geneva. They also requested that the treaty bodies be able to meet, on occasion, in other United Nations regional offices.

11. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has taken the step of formally requesting that a session be held in New York. However, the General Assembly failed to approve the request and no other Geneva-based treaty body has made a formal request to hold a session in New York. Neither has the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women formally requested that one of its sessions be held in Geneva.

B. Provision of human rights training to United Nations personnel in the field

12. Reiterating their view of the importance of providing human rights training to all United Nations personnel in the field, the chairpersons at their 9th meeting encouraged the High Commissioner for Human Rights to implement, as soon as possible, a basic human rights training package for personnel throughout the United Nations system, including UNDP, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other relevant agencies (A/53/125, annex, para. 39).

13. Information on training programmes conducted by OHCHR is contained in the report of the secretariat to the 10th meeting of chairpersons (HRI/MC/1998/4, paras. 13-15) and in the report of the Secretary-General on advisory services and technical cooperation in the field of human rights submitted to the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/1999/99).

14. In addition, considerable progress is being made on the development of human rights training materials for UNDP personnel. A draft training manual on human rights and programming has been prepared by UNDP and is currently under review in consultation with OHCHR. Discussions have also been initiated with the United Nations Staff College in Turin in connection with its possible role in providing human rights training to United Nations development personnel. It is envisaged that the manual would continuously be updated and modified with experience gained from use in training courses, with the first such event foreseen for May 1999.

15. Other training or information initiatives to promote knowledge of human rights norms and procedures in the United Nations system include the development of training materials for development officials through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the elaboration of human rights guidelines for resident coordinators. The UNDAF training materials are being developed through the Working Group on the Right to Development of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) by training specialists from OHCHR, UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA. With respect to the guidelines for resident coordinators, draft guidelines will be submitted to the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) for its review and adoption.

IV. SERVICING OF THE TREATY BODIES

16. At their 10th meeting, the chairpersons reiterated their appeals contained in the reports on their 8th and 9th meetings that the specialized secretariat staff servicing the committees be significantly strengthened. The chairpersons expressed the view that the possibility of seeking voluntary funds must be further explored, although adequate provision to human rights treaty bodies should be developed within the regular budget allocated to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

17. As noted by the chairpersons, secretariat staffing requirements for servicing of the five Geneva-based treaty bodies were presented in detail in the report of the secretariat to the 10th meeting (HRI/MC/1998/4) and were compared with the number of posts available. According to the analysis contained in that report, ten and a half additional posts would be required in order to discharge effectively the responsibilities involved in the servicing of the treaty bodies, including with regard to the individual complaints procedures.

18. The proposed programme budget of the United Nations for the biennium 2000-2001 allows for two additional regular posts in relation to servicing of the treaty bodies. The support team recruited under the Plan of Action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1/ is able to address the most pressing substantive servicing requirements of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Similarly, the staff member being recruited under the Plan of Action to strengthen the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1/ will address many of the substantive servicing requirements of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

19. Pursuant to a recommendation of the chairpersons at their 9th and 10th meetings, a draft plan of action addressing the needs of the three remaining Geneva-based treaty bodies has been presented to the chairpersons and revised in accordance with their comments. The revised draft plan is before the chairpersons (HRI/MC/1999/Misc.1).

1/ See section V.

V. STATUS OF THE PLANS OF ACTION TO STRENGTHEN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD AND THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

20. The Plan of Action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was launched in November 1996 and became operational in July 1997, when the first members of the support team called for in the Plan were recruited. The voluntary contributions received through the Plan enabled the support provided to the Committee on the Rights of the Child to improve considerably. In particular, a new sophisticated format of country analyses has been developed which has favourably impacted the work of the Committee. A survey of relevant technical cooperation projects that are implemented by OHCHR, UNICEF and other partners has also been conducted as part of an overall effort to facilitate follow-up to the recommendations of the Committee and the design of OHCHR technical cooperation projects. The activities foreseen under the Plan are envisaged to be undertaken by a substantive support team of five Professional staff members, aided by one General Service assistant. The Plan is in its second operational year; extension beyond July 2000 will depend on the availability of funds. As at 9 April 1999, US$ 1,722,210.27 had been contributed under the Plan by the Governments of Australia, Colombia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Ghana, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Luxemburg, Mauritius, Norway, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, South Africa and Sweden and an individual named I. Frankl.

21. The Plan of Action to strengthen the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was launched in May 1997 to strengthen the assistance available to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Plan envisages the appointment of a two-member specialist support team and a small activities budget for technical cooperation projects or meetings, also to be financed from voluntary contributions. As at 9 April 1999, US$ 166,947.92 had been received from the Governments of Brazil, Cyprus, France, the Netherlands and Portugal, which is sufficient for the recruitment of one specialist. Consequently, a person has been recruited and is expected to assume her responsibilities with the Committee shortly.